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RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN COMMUNIST CHINA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
Summary		ii
I.	Official Communist Policy	1
II.	Incidents Involving Catholic Missions	3
III.	Incidents Involving Protestant Missions	5
IV.	Factors in Treatment of Religious Groups	7
V.	Conclusion	11

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SUMMARY

The Chinese Communists have repeatedly proclaimed that they uphold religious freedom as defined by "law." In harmony with the Soviet policy, however, Communist policy as revealed in practice does not recognize as inherent the right of individuals to practice the religion of their choice. Instead, it establishes that right within the framework of a totalitarian state which, by its structure, rigidly limits all "rights" and can even withdraw any "right" altogether. Religious freedom is dependent upon the observance of Communist "laws," and these laws or programs have usually been directly opposed to the evangelical and educational programs fostered by religious groups.

Consequently, the policies of the Chinese Communists in regard to religion have followed a characteristic zigzagging course dictated by political and economic expediency, and the Communists are resorting to inconsistent or oppressive means that are, in their eyes, justified in order to establish their regime within the framework of the totalitarian state.

Reports from Protestant and Catholic groups have cited numerous instances of lack of religious toleration, varying from subjection to Communist indoctrinations to severe beatings, imprisonment, and killings. Native Christian leaders in particular have suffered from Communist "people's courts." Treatment of medical missionaries and religious

relief teams has, in some cases, proved to be an exception to the general practice. However, as a result of the intensification of anti-religious attitudes and actions, as well as anti-foreign and anti-American sentiment, some Protestant and Catholic missions have already withdrawn missionaries from areas that are under Communist control or threatened by the Communists. Other groups are initiating plans for the evacuation of missionaries as circumstances dictate.

The gulf between the Communist word and deed makes the future status of religion, particularly of Christianity, highly uncertain in Communist China. Should the relations of the Communists with the Christian nations of the West improve or should the Communists seek political and economic support from the West, then Christian missions -- and possibly foreign missionaries -- may be accorded limited protection. Should the iron curtain come down in the Far East, however, all foreign missionaries behind the curtain would probably be regarded as spies to be driven out or assembled in urban areas under the watchful eyes of the police, and the position of the native Christian might become well-nigh intolerable. The Chinese Communists are adding yet another chapter to the long history of Christian persecution in China.

RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN COMMUNIST CHINA

I. OFFICIAL COMMUNIST POLICY

Official statements by top Communist leaders regarding religious freedom in "liberated areas" appear to establish a policy of religious toleration, but examination of these statements usually reveals a qualifying clause that makes religious freedom dependent upon the observance of Communist "laws." The word "laws" in this connection is ambiguous, but questionings of Chou En-lai and Mao Tse-tung in January and February 1947 indicated that the Communist leaders regard these "laws" as tantamount to the implementation of the Communist Party programs.

In April 1945 Mao Tse-tung, in a speech "On Coalition Government" to the Seventh National Congress of the Communist Party, expressed Communist policy as follows:

> "In accordance with the principle of religious freedom, all religions are allowed to exist in the liberated areas. The government will protect all Protestants, Catholics, Mohammedans, Buddhists and other religious believers, if they observe its laws and decrees. It is forbidden to force people to accept any religion or to discriminate against unbelievers."[1]

Chou En-lai and Lu Ting-yi, Director of the Publicity Department of the Communist Party, have also emphasized that they do not object to religious beliefs as long as such beliefs do not interfere with the observance of

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1. USIS, Chungking, May 2, 1945, p. 43, quoting from Chieh Fang Jih Pao (Yenan).

Communist "laws." Two Communist liaison officers, however, have said that the Communists "are opposed to the infiltration of religious ideas. There is no law against the work of missionaries, but we don't like their influence on the people because it is different from our ideas."[1] Chou En-lai also is reported to have remarked: "We treat them [missionaries] very gently. We try to reform them."[2]

Although the Communist Party leaders have publicly stressed toleration, as early as the Communist occupation of Kalgan in 1945-46 there was evidence that they practiced no such toleration. In conversations with newspaper correspondents, Communist leaders revealed that they had knowledge of actions taken against Catholics because of their landholdings. Chou En-lai declared that the reason for peasant action was the amount of land that the Catholics had obtained following the Boxer Rebellion. He also said that a Polish mission (believed to be the mission at Hsing-T'ai, Hopei) had been attacked because the missionaries had aided the Japanese in spying upon the people; the people had therefore treated them as traitors.[3]

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1. D-10, Pei-p'ing, February 17, 1947, CONFIDENTIAL.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

Reported examples of Communist intolerance of Catholic and Protestant priests and missionaries, as well as of native Christians, have ranged from forced attendance at Communist indoctrination courses to imprisonment, torture, and death.[1] In addition, the Communists have disrupted church services and functions and occupied church property or confiscated church supplies.[2] Communist cadres have instigated tou chengs, or "settling of accounts", against church mission property.[3] Buddhist and Taoist priests have also reported looting of their temples and conscription of their younger monks.[4]

II. INCIDENTS INVOLVING CATHOLIC MISSIONS

The account of the treatment of the mission of Siwantze in Chahar is a fully documented example of the many reports regarding Communist treatment of Catholic missions. At Siwantze, during the winter of 1945-46, the Communists first forced a sale of church property and then for ten days allowed the mobs to loot the church, the novitiate of the Chinese sisters, the bishop's house, and the seminary. Following this, the chief of police made an agreement with the priests for the return of the buildings of the mission and the goods that had not been

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1. D-40, Pei-p'ing, March 8, 1948, CONFIDENTIAL.
2. DX-1152, April 21, 1947, CONFIDENTIAL.
3. D-24, Pei-p'ing, April 25, 1946, RESTRICTED.
4. The Times (London), February 12, 1948; D-387, London, February 13, 1948, UNCLASSIFIED.

consumed. However, of the 200 mou of land owned by the mission in the villages of Tungkoumen and Siwantze, only 30 were returned.

In another instance, two priests of a Catholic mission near Kalgan were bound and led to the threshing ground, where they were forced to confess failure to pay in full the people who had built the church. Other mission centers were taxed beyond their ability to pay, and consequently their property was seized.[1]

There have been numerous examples of imprisonment of Catholic priests. In an interview in February 1948, two Belgian priests who had been imprisoned at Ch'ao-yang and Ling-nan in Jehol Province gave detailed information on their treatment by the Communists.[2] One of the priests reported that he was imprisoned in a crowded room where there was just room to lie down; in addition, food was very poor and the prisoners were allowed no exercise. The other priest said that he had been threatened with death. He reported that during his imprisonment of nine months he observed 500 prisoners pass through the prison, and he noted that 50 of these were tortured for confessions of alleged wrongs they had committed against the Communists. According to one of the priests eight Chinese Catholic laymen and three Chinese priests were

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1. D-24, Pei-p'ing, April 25, 1948, RESTRICTED; D-40, Pei-p'ing, March 8, 1948, CONFIDENTIAL.
2. D-14, Tientsin, February 4, 1948, CONFIDENTIAL.

killed near Ch'ih-feng, Jehol, because they refused to apostatize.[1]

In a broadcast on March 17, 1948 the Communists announced that the democratic government of Tsitsihar had convicted twelve officials of the Catholic Swiss Berner Mission on charges of "espionage, sabotage and armed conspiracy against the government." Among them were the Swiss bishop and another high-ranking official of the mission, who were sentenced to twelve years' confinement. The other ten, including at least one German, were sentenced to terms of three to five years. The broadcast explained that the accused were guilty of aiding the Japanese and the Kuomintang secret service and concluded with the following reiteration of Communist policy toward religion:

> "Freedom of religion ... is a fixed policy of the democratic government and the People's Liberation Army. All missionaries and believers of religion will be protected regardless of their nationality, as long as they abide by the law and do not engage in subversive activities. But anyone who, under cover of religious activities, carries on espionage for Chiang Kai-shek or foreign imperialism against the Chinese people will be tried and adjudged in accordance with the severity of his crime by the courts of the democratic government."[2]

III. INCIDENTS INVOLVING PROTESTANT MISSIONS

Protestant missions have also suffered from Communist hostility.[3]

A Protestant woman missionary in Kalgan reported that, although the

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1. Ibid., February 4, 1948, CONFIDENTIAL. Vatican News Service has reported that 82 Catholic missionaries were killed in China from February 1947 to February 1948 -- the "victims of communism in China." (New York Herald Tribune, April 8, 1948)
2. FBIB, Daily Report, March 17, 1948, pp. CCC 1-2.
3. D-40, Pei-p'ing, March 8, 1948, CONFIDENTIAL.

Communists proclaimed freedom of religion, they destroyed the work of missions either directly or indirectly by propaganda that discouraged church attendance or participation in other church functions.[1] A fragmentary account from Hopei indicated that the Communists interfered with or prohibited religious services in many areas and instilled fear in the native Christians.[2]

The killing of three missionaries in Central China in mid-January 1948 was reportedly carried out by bandits.[3] The Communists claim that these "bandits" were actually troops of the Kuomintang Five-Hsi Joint Defense Office in Chungsiang, Hupeh.[4] Since this area has been the scene of Communist raids and the National Government has admitted that it cannot give assurances of protection to foreigners there, it is difficult to establish responsibility for the murders.[5]

The account of the Communist attack upon Ch'ang-li, Hopei, indicates that Communist treatment of the American Protestant missionaries there was considerably more lenient than that accorded many Catholic

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1. DX-1087, October 25, 1946, p. 2, CONFIDENTIAL.
2. DX-1152, April 21, 1947, CONFIDENTIAL.
3. New York Times, January 12, 1948.
4. Chinese Press Review, February 21, 1948, citing the New China News Agency.
5. New York Times, January 17, 1948.

missionaries.[1] The Communists entered the mission compound and looted goods. They also led some of the missionaries and students into the hillside about seven miles from Ch'ang-li and gave them a long lecture on Communism, apparently in an attempt to convert them. The students were invited to join, but there have been no reports of acceptance. The group was kept under Communist surveillance for only one day and one night, during which they were sheltered and fed by the villagers.[2]

On the other hand, a Protestant mission at Tsanghsien, Hopei, has reported that it has been allowed to carry out medical work and to continue religious services. Two members of the mission received permission to go into Pei-p'ing for medical supplies. Religious relief teams have also reported favorable treatment.[3]

IV. FACTORS IN TREATMENT OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Possible reasons for the Communist attitude toward both Catholic and Protestant missionaries are fairly numerous. First, Communism as a faith and way of life conflicts with Christianity and other religious faiths, including Buddhism, particularly in attitudes and policies toward property, the family system, and education. It therefore becomes a standard procedure for the Communists to take action against

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1. D-84, Tientsin, June 24, 1947, CONFIDENTIAL.
2. D-124, Tientsin, September 5, 1947, CONFIDENTIAL.
3. D-270, Shanghai, August 5, 1947, SECRET.

missionaries and native believers or their property on the basis of violation of Communist "law."

The extensive property holdings of the Catholic Church, particularly in such areas as Inner Mongolia, is an important factor in the Communist treatment of the Catholic missionaries.[1] Related to this is the fact that, in many of the district parishes, the Catholics practically govern the whole community. This control may be economic, through land-renting or other programs, as well as religious. One Catholic priest said that every inhabitant in his village of 300 people in Inner Mongolia was a Catholic.[2]

Another reason for the Communist actions has been the influence of Protestant and Catholic missions in the schools. Chinese Communism, like Communism in the USSR, is determined to indoctrinate the youth in order to perpetuate Communist ideology. Any church that attempts to teach the youth other beliefs must expect to face continuing opposition in Communist-occupied areas.

In general, the Communists appear to have treated the Protestants more leniently than the Catholics. There are several possible explanations. First, the Catholic missions are scattered throughout the rural

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1. Of a total of 1,765,776 mou, or 294,296 acres, leased to foreigners by 1946, the Belgians were reported to hold 1,726,170 mou. Most of the land held by the Belgians is in Shensi and is probably used for missionary purposes. (A-14, Nanking, January 12, 1948, UNCLASSIFIED)

2. DX-1689, February 9, 1948, p. 4, RESTRICTED.

areas of North China and Manchuria and have come directly into conflict with the Communist agrarian programs, whereas the Protestant missions have generally been confined to urban areas, or larger towns, from which they have operated their rural services. Second, many of the foreign priests and nuns are nationals of small countries or, in some cases, of former enemy nations such as Germany. Many of these individuals have had little or no recourse to higher authorities for protection. In addition, many of the Catholic missionaries (e.g., some Swiss missionaries in Manchuria) remained in China during the Japanese occupation as neutral citizens.[1] These missionaries were, therefore, on hand to witness the occupation techniques of the Communists. In many instances, the Communists appear to have stirred up public action against the Catholic missionaries on charges of collaboration with the Japanese.

Allied with this discrimination against both foreign and native missionaries has been a general intensification of anti-foreignism. Numerous sources have noted the increased anti-American sentiment prevailing in Communist areas. The anti-American propaganda has also included attacks on the church, by the claim that American missionaries have fostered American imperialism.[2] Anti-foreign sentiment is a strong weapon that has been used in other periods of Chinese history when one

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1. FBIB, Daily Report (FE), March 17, 1948, pp. CCC 1-2.
2. New York Herald Tribune, article by Christopher Rand, February 1, 1948

political party or group has been attempting to overthrow another. Various reasons have been advanced for the increased tempo at this time, among them the Communists' objection to the small amount of UNRRA supplies that they received, resentment of the aid that they claim the Americans have given to the Nationalists, and suspicion of all missionaries, particularly Americans, ever since Bishop Paul Yupin endorsed Chiang's "death to the Chinese Communists."[1]

As a result of the intensification of anti-religious activity in Communist areas, some Catholic and Protestant groups have reversed their earlier plans for maintaining missions in Communist regions. The last few months of 1947 and the early months of 1948 have brought increasing evidence of Communist interference with the religious functions of both Catholic and Protestant groups. A request for evacuation of the priests and nuns of the Catholic mission at Hsienhsien, Hopei, which was recently raided by the Communists, has been received by American consular officials.[2] Several Protestant missionaries have been evacuated from areas that have been threatened by the Communist forces,[3] and there is evidence that other groups are contemplating evacuation.[4]

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1. DX-2087, March 11, 1948, CONFIDENTIAL.
2. D-6, Tientsin, January 26, 1948, CONFIDENTIAL.
3. New York Herald Tribune, January 16, 1948.
4. New York Times, March 14, 1948; D-40, Pei-p'ing, March 8, 1948, CONFIDENTIAL.

V. CONCLUSION

The gulf between Communist word and deed makes the future status of religion, particularly of Christianity, highly uncertain in Communist China. Should the relations of the Communists with the Christian nations of the West improve or should the Communists seek political and economic support from the West, then Christian missions -- and possibly foreign missionaries -- may be given limited protection. Should the iron curtain come down in the Far East, however, all foreign missionaries behind the curtain would probably be regarded as spies to be driven out or assembled in urban areas under the watchful eyes of the police, and the position of the native Christian might become well-nigh intolerable. The Chinese Communists are adding yet another chapter to the long history of Christian persecution in China.